

## PIERO PICCIONI (music)

Italian composer and jazz musician Piero Piccioni, who wrote the scores for nearly 200 Italian movies, including most of the films directed by comic star Alberto Sordi, was born in Turin in 1920. Piccioni began his career as a radio pianist in 1938, and, after the war, started his own jazz group, the first to be broadcast in Italy. His group soon became popular in Roman night clubs.

Piccioni won notoriety when he was accused of responsibility for the mysterious death of a 20-year-old girl, Wilma Montesi, whose body was found on a beach off the Roman coast in April 1953. As Piccioni was the son of the then Italian foreign minister, a leading Christian Democrat politician, the Montesi affair kept the media occupied for many years, providing much political fuel for the Italian left. In the end, not even the public prosecutor seemed to believe in the defendant's guilt.

Following the trial, Piccioni went back to his music. In 1959, Francesco Rosi chose him to write the music for his second feature, *I Magliari*, for which he wanted a jazz score. Rosi then hired Piccioni for his subsequent film, *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962), the powerful score for which was one of the movie's most compelling elements. Subsequently, Rosi asked Piccioni to compose the music for all his films, from *Hands Over The City* (1963) to *Chronicle Of A Death Foretold*, filmed in Colombia in 1979.

Rosi described their creative collaboration. "It was based on mutual respect. Piero didn't start composing until he had seen the first cut. An example of the way we worked was on *The Mattei Affair* in 1972, where, after I told him I wanted the petroleum chief's heartbeat to be heard on the soundtrack, Piero came up with an entirely electronic score".

Piccioni's melodic score for Rosi's realistic Neapolitan fairy tale, *More Than A Miracle* (1967), starring Sophia Loren and Omar Sharif, was such a success in the U.S. that it made the Hit Parade. Many of the themes he composed for Alberto Sordi were also popular hits. He also composed scores for such directors as Luchino Visconti, Vittorio De Sica, Mario Monicelli, Roberto Rossellini, Tinto Brass, Mauro Bolognini and Bernardo Bertolucci, among many others; he also wrote the score for the Italian release version of Godard's *Contempt*. As the composer of Italian movie scores, he is rivaled only by his contemporaries Ennio Morricone, Carlo Rustichelli, and Nino Rota (who has been erroneously credited with part of the *Mafioso* score).

Piccioni died in 1994, age 82.

- adapted from obituary by John Francis Lane, *The Guardian* (London)

